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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

Thesis

THE WORD, THE SOUND, THE INWARD SIGHT

Submitted by

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The word, the sound, the inward sight
Induces poetry to flight.

Pablo Ruiz Picasso 1881-

Mother and Child

(See Page 16)

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PREFACE

At one time in the American West great ranches sprawled over the arid land with no fences and no lines of demarcation dividing them. A cowhand familiar with the territory could identify one range by its water hole and canyon, another by its old corral and cone shaped erosion. But even to the expert these tracts of land had many similarities. Likewise prose and poetic expression sprawl over the plains of literature with no strict division between them.

Poetic prose has developed emotional and metaphorical description using the language of poetry to expedite such forms as the novel. Poetry has widened its subject matter to include homely ideas and has accepted the cadence of free verse. This cadence resembles closely the poetic prose sentence. In this short introduction I shall try to show the methods used in the composition of the following sonnets. Since the sonnet is a highly formal mode of poetry, the description of its creation will indicate some of the characteristics of poetry which distinguish it from the range of prose.

With the newspapers, magazines, best-sellers, radio programs, and moving pictures of today one is surrounded by a constant flood of prose expression. Thus when I find a

mood, emotion, or idea to express, it inadvertently grows from my thinking in the form of prose. With this nucleus I search for suitable means of development. In the following pages I have chosen the sonnet form which immediately limits my use of words to fourteen lines of iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme may be either four quatrains and a couplet of the Shakesperian type, or an octet and sesten of the Petrarchian type.

The Word

Part of the enjoyment of the sonnet is the fitting of thought in a pattern. This is like boiling the sap of the maple tree to make maple sugar. From the full caldron of vocabulary the artist refines until he has the essence. Since the quantity of small each meaning is important to the whole.

While hunting for a word to complete a rhyme scheme or a word which has the pulse for the iambic line or the correct vowel sounds, the writer probes deeply into the thought he is trying to express. Meaning grows clearer with each new problem of selection. The word "Inexorable" in the poem Enchantment is vital to that poem because it contains the meaning, the pulse and the mood of the subject. No other

word would fit into the sonnet as well. It is an integral part of the poem.

However, the problem of diction in poetry is more complex than just arranging words in a pattern. One is dealing with imagery and comparison; therefore one must use language which excites the imagination and choose comparisons which make the subject more vivid. A word when used imaginatively in a comparison should call to the readers mind a body of implicated ideas. The word "eel" in my poem Subway Home is compared with the subway train. The slippery, slithery movement of an eel burrowing into the ground is implied by the association of the eel and the subway, and is intended to make the movement of the subway train more vivid.

I have tried to draw imaginative words from current language with some limitations. I believe that there is danger in using slang because it disappears so quickly from the language. I have used few technical and archaic words because they do not have enough universality of implication. Vulgar words and profanity imply a coarseness which did not fit into the mood of these particular sonnets.

In the poem One Afternoon I have placed the words "divine" and "cute" in their slang usage because I felt they gave an authenticity to the ladies' conversation. I can conceive of technical, vulgar and archaic words being used

to create their own variety of authenticity in a poem, but in general I have avoided them.

Thus the words were chosen for these sonnets from a limited body of language for their imaginative qualities, their implications and aptness in comparison as well as their conformity to pattern and mood.

The Sound

The music of poetry is closely allied to its meaning. However, for the sake of clarity let us separate the two and consider music as composed of rhythm and sound. In the sonnet the meter or beat is iambic, and when it is skillfully employed, its regularity enhances the flow of meaning. Many devices such as the run-on line, alliteration, and insertion of other metrical feet keep it from becoming too monotonous.

Combinations of vowel and consonant sounds are used in both prose and poetry to help create mood. Because of the limited number of words in the sonnet, sound is especially important for the effects it can produce in a single line.

"A pause, a start, a harsh and grating squeal": this line jerks forward with the motion of the subway which it describes. There is a progression from "pause" to "squeal" in the vowel sounds. They move from the back to the front

of the throat. Also there is a progression in the meaning of the words when they are placed in the poem.

"With whirling, twirling pirouette and leap": this line has an "r" sound and a rounding out at the ending of the words (the "ing" and the "ette"); so the line is intended to spin with the meaning. I have tried to emphasize sound in these poems as a base for the mood upon which the meaning can build.

The Inward Sight

My poems aim at some inward revelation for the reader. It may be merely a point of view concerning women at cards or it may be the importance of the atom bomb. I chose the sonnet form because it allows me to express a wide range of subject matter compactly and artistically with an element of restraint. I do not intend to connect the sonnets together in one philosophy or in a cycle, but each is a separate unit in itself describing some phase of contemporary life or thought. My object is to guide the reader to a perception of the material in such a way that he identifies himself with a feeling for it.

An artist can not create without injecting some of his own emotion into his creation, but in these sonnets I have

tried to use as little of my own personality as possible and still allow the poem to express a well-rounded idea. By using a realistic restraint I have attempted to make my language and ideas universal so that many people can associate themselves with my sonnets. I have built the scene or thought with the conscious aim of expressing my subject so that it will give the reader a freshness in vision or insight. I have tried to restrain my imaginative language so that the picture or idea expressed will have a reality for the reader.

My aim was not to force the reader to look at me from a distance and puzzle out the meaning of my references and allusions, but to plunge him into the scene or thought as if it were his own. I do not depend on volume but on quality. Sensitivity in selection of words not only controls imagery and music of sonnets but also the emotional identification of the reader with the subject expressed.

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Candlelight

There is some elemental truth in light
From candles whether casting lavish gleams
On savory-steaming sides of gold tureens
In rich effect for wealthy gourmet's sight,
Or simply pushing shadows back at night
Against the rough-hewn walls of barest means
Providing rays of warmth in drabbest scenes.
When, philosophic, I begin to write,
I think of wax that burned by shrewd Voltaire's
Cold canny words to kings, of gorgeous phrase
That flowed when Shakespeare's wick was lit,
And heavy-lidded Lincoln bowed with cares.
Perhaps all life should end in one great blaze
For many flames were used in building it.

Ballet

Reality has gone to roam the street
While I embrace the coy abstract in dance.
Consoling breaths of music weave a trance
To guide the weightlessness of flying feet
And flush my cold inductive mind with heat.
Like wine the cloying essence of romance
Excites the images in graceful stance
To nameless moods illusive but complete.
With whirling, twirling pirouette and leap
Through wingless space, emotion rips the heart
And spirals swiftly to finality
While balance ends a pantomime of sleep
With death. The end; I rise, applaud the art
And then file out to meet reality.

City At Night

While restless city hums in monotone
At night, the river moves without a sound
Between the tall enclosing walls of stone.
The tiers of close-packed rooms impound
The groups of men, while ebon water flows
Unceasingly to join the sea. In haze
Where skyline blends with heavens, rows
Of tiny lights fade against the blaze
Of planets. Spreads of cable in a span
Extend above the stream in lines that seem
As unpretentious as a broken fan
Beside the mammouth arch of stars. The scheme
Of man-engendered beauty meekly lies
Near ancient river and ageless skies.

The Age Of Flight

Cold wings embrace the narrow band of air
Which wraps our earth. The bare infinity
Of space beyond awaits ability
Of man to understand, prepare, and dare.
While close to ground among humanity,
These serving wings exchange and interwind
The goods of toil with dreams yet undesigned.
They give to all the world urbanity
Of wider scope. The air-borne man will find
Near him as neighbors Spanish, French, Chinese
The Eskimo, the Dane and Senegalese.
At last our tiny planet is defined.
The proud are held beside the dregs of race
Imprisoned on the earth by chartless space.

Subway Home

A raucous rushing vibrates cars of steel
While signals throw green jade on rails or gleam
In cautious amber. Then a brash red beam
Retards the lunging forward of each wheel.
A pause, a start, a harsh and grating squeal
Jolts riders from the newsprint or a dream
To see men writhing in one mass. They seem
Like pulp digested by an urban eel.
The doors hiss open. Herds of feet complain
Against cement, ascend cold stairs to air,
And tramp until their frowzy home is found.
While tired, stifled men revive again
In quiet rooms, below with blatant blare
The eel slides swiftly through the trembling ground.

Assembly Line

In cold uncompromising rows of steel
The skeletons of cars precisely glide
To that position where the workmen feel
Along a ridge and turn a bolt, one side
And then the other. Each adjustment, quick
Yet dull, is followed by a dormant mind-
The same metallic edge, same grip and click
Of wrenches on the same type nut, same grind
As threads revolve, same backward step and wait,
And to the next, the next, and next repeat-
Thank God that men can dream so hands are late
Or that a tool may fall on aching feet;
Thus show the human failing, precious bane
Which kills monotony and keeps men sane.

City Church

Where thick-set trunks of business buildings formed
In steep walled paths for traffic, was a plot
Of undisturbed and ancient graves unwarmed
By sun. Beside this spot as if begot
By some medieval mind, a chapel lay
With walls coal black against the city's glare.
Forbidding, Gothic was its dark display
Of stone, encrusted with a smoke sent there
From costly furnaces of man-made hell.
But once inside a dim and mystic light
Removed commercial roar and cast a spell
As inexplicable as love. The sight
Persuaded men to stop from work and rest
Unmindful of a profit to invest.

American Music Festival- Second of Two Programs

Like fog tense silence smooths the wave
Of conversation while upon the stage
Musicians glance beyond the crowded stave
Intent to catch instruction from the sage
And unassuming swing of master arms;
Then every ear is drowned in surging sound.
The siren strings invoke their harsh alarms
With braying horns, a rumbling rolling pound
On drums. The slashing blades of cymbals cut
The air and restless strains of city lives
Collide in dissonance. In tonal rut
The great machine repeats its pulsing drives.
There is no peace, no simple, soothing theme,
No Beethoven by a woodland stream.

Dust

I am a God inside the running mill
Who swells with every working throb and cakes
Machine or saw while smothering hoarse breaks
Of sound. With furnace heat I spume and spill
About the building tops to hide in schools
And haunt cold courts of justice with no law,
No curb to freedom. I ride the winter thaw
And glide from alleyway to drain in pools
Of filth. And yet I coat the cleanest wall,
Invisible. I fill your clothes, your chair;
I stand in food you eat, in breaths of air.
The omnipresent, I encompass all
Existing earth. And when you die you must
Revert again to me, for I am dust.

Enchantment

A painter gazed across perpetual sky
Then dipped his color-conscious brush in thought
Distilling out the movements he had caught
In problems of dynamics for the eye.
A wise astronomer conceived our sun
Involved in systems whirling far apart.
He coldly plotted orbits on his chart
And wondered how the motion had begun.
A young composer heard celestial light
As bass, and every planet sang its note
In counterpoint while he, impassioned, wrote.
There is enchantment in the void of night,
For thinking men believe they can express
Its vast inexorable emptiness.

The Library

The rows of souls, the aisles of thought, each shade
From hate to hope which line the shelves in neat
And numbered order are, in part, defeat
For death because they hold a cavalcade
Of language, history, and wit arrayed
Before the human mind. Yet words that beat
Confined in lines of print are but the seat
Of fresher, pregnant words and need the aid
Of living eyes, the pulse of man alive,
To lift them into being. When for ages
A parchment or a stylus wax has lain unread
In some deep place where man can not survive,
Its words have paled and crumbled from the pages,
Then disappeared unvisualized and dead.

Playground

A child is swinging on a playground swing
And striving for as high as he can fly.
Two little girls at teeter-totter sing
"A Seesaw Maggie Daw" to drown the cry
From baby carriages near by. The toe
Of one despondent kicks his ball a rap.
The golden sandpile is the depth of woe
For someone stole a shovel. Jump ropes tap
As youngsters leap with care. The boys take aim
To roll their agates with a measured skill.
The girls hold hands and run in their new game
Where one slow girl can cause them all to spill
Thus children spend tremendous energy
While living through a day's intensity.

Clerk

Oh! lustrous-headed goddess, queen of scent
From what archaic land did you unearth
Your viols of balm, your many dollar's worth
Of subtle powders? What Sultana sent
Your oriental salves from her estate
To mingle in your sweet and lucid brews?
What esoteric language did you use;
What moods or moments did the scribe translate
To name your wares Tabu, Emir, My Sin?
And in your very open eyes what dream
Is spilling out above long lashes over cream
Of rose spread silken on your cheeks? Begin
Your charming words. No matter what you say,
I know you stand on aching feet all day.

Electrons

I grasp the world, an orb in unknown space.
I know that thereupon an ocean lies
Around a host of atolls. On the face
Of one a clump of supple palm trees rise.
I have been told that ocean, reef and tree
Are but unmeasured mass of vital things,
Minute beyond what human mind can see;
And closely each to each electron clings.
When man-willed power bursts upon this spot,
The waters boil convulsed with steam and shake
Around the splintered palms, still seered and hot;
And soil is spoil in barren seedless wake.
Yet, through this fluent force and livid flame,
These elemental bits survive the same.

The Museum

The feather-footed echoes down the hall
Of public galleries of art become
A roar on Sunday when the people stall
The dullness of an afternoon with glum
Determination to enjoy. A child
With dreamy gaze and pig-tails sighs
At women dressed in satin. A wild
Young urchin races playing tag. The eyes
Of youth stare blushing at a nude.
A man and wife discuss the cubes and planes
Abstract. A pudgy salesman slurs a crude
Remark about a Venus. Calm, urbane
A student, quite oblivious of noise,
Perceives rich color and the grace in poise.

Mother and Child

The age old subject, mother holding child,
Picasso drew with modulating line
As sensitive as if he, like the mild
Hui Tsung, had sat complacent to define
The slope of shoulders and the forming of
Related hands and finger tips while held
In contemplation of maternal love.
He made no unreserved attempt to weld
A deep religious theme in womanhood
But deftly chose a poignant, youthful head
With sensuality he understood.
In every meditated stroke he said:
"This is the gentle and productive flesh
Which holds the future in a human mesh."

Suburban Morning

The pale insipid glow increased and stretched
Unwelcome light throughout the heatless shroud
Of winter sky. With clangs unjustly loud
The clocks alarmed while sleepers sketched
Their rooms with conscious eyes. Soon mothered smells
Of toasting bread and scented steam awoke
The drowsy dwellings. Breakfast dishes spoke
In chatter to the kitchen table. Spells
Of words brought back from yesterday
Began the family conversation
With useful bits of information.
Outside the hissing trains at stations lay
In waiting to accept the men and go
Along the dirty paths of sooty snow.

One Afternoon

At cards four women spent their time.
One dealt; two talked; the other ate a sweet.
Their range of conversation was complete.
"Oh, wasn't Minnie's hat divine!"
"I thought Agnella did look fine,
But my she's aged." "If you girls want a treat
Go see that cute new shop on Cypress Street."
The other ate a gumdrop, flavored lime.
"I bid one heart." "One spade." "Oh! Guess I'll by."
"You must have heard that Mister Kit
Has lost his job." "No, When?" "A week ago."
The other ate a mint and said; "Girls, I
Am selling tickets to a benefit
For Europe's starving children. I hope you'll go?"

Invalid

"Stay, Helen, I must have a chaperone
Since three such handsome men have come to call."
Her daughter smiled. The Mother fixed her shawl
As guests walked in. Her natural ease and tone
Spoke cordial greeting. They arranged about her chair
While conversation curled like pungent smoke
And thrilled the intellects to whom she spoke
With mellow words from a burning mind, more fair
In age. The sunbeams reflecting on her hands
Were many notes of Chopin, Mozart, Brahms
Returned to feel an expert's touch. The charms
Of judgment, fervent views of foreign lands
She raised as screens against a basic dread
Of painful moments left in life ahead.

Flight

In Answer To The Waste Land

I have, at times, left schizophrenic earth,
Crass, sordid tenement of machines and men,
Have fled dry soil which drains as it gives birth,
The petulant sea in slow decay. And when
I rose, I seemed to lose all futile haste
Then feel the easy regal speed of flight.
I have touched clouds that walked in muted waste.
But as the plane broke through to clearer light
Above, with gaping awe I've seen the great,
Unbound expanse enlarge in hollow sky,
A godless, hopeless space inanimate
With all the horror vacancies imply.
Then I have shrunk in thought, afraid to be
Away from tiny earth and minute sea.

The Fishermen

The busy brush of oars, laconic speech
By fishermen, and sounds in wood float
To shore from a sway-backed fishing boat
And dories as men haul the net. With each
Braced heave the phosphorescence on white fish
Flicks blue light, fades, and leaves the gleaming scales
To slither in the hull. The catch then flails
On oaken ribs with tails. A shifting swish
Of liquid notes cascades in hollow night.
Full, heaping drifters of new food
Assemble in a lazy, heavy brood
About the larger craft. A welcome light,
The moon, arises when horizon-free
And walks like Christ across the sleeping sea.

Uncommon Warmth

Uncommon warmth for winter settled heavily
Upon the wooded land. An earthy scent
As close and musty as wet cattle pent
In snow-bound barns came creeping stealthily
From deep recesses of the sweating soil.
The creviced walls of stone, gray and green,
Were tumbled carelessly. A full mill stream
Ran splattering with rapid twist and coil
Around the rocks. I recollected spring
With sweeter fragrance of this very scene,
With all its softness like the mellow sheen
Of wilting petals, with its birds that sing
By rote. But suddenly the wind came there
In cold uncompromising breaths of air.

Barn Dance

While singing swing your partner round and round,
And grind the hayseed in the bending floor.
Hold up her hand to be an arching door
And let the couples pass through homeward bound.
Return the bow of opposites, return the smile
Of every pretty girl you meet and stamp
Your feet with slapping steps and rap-a-tramp
Around the ring of arms in single file.
Now all join hands and honor to the left;
Now all join hands and honor to the right;
Now all clap hands and yell into the night
And twirl the sweetest girl with all your heft.
So pick a partner and enjoy it all;
For life is just a turn about the hall.

Island Noon

Upon a gnarled and knuckled rocky ledge
Above the flesh-like roll of meadow land
And tapered fingers of the island's edge,
At noon the shabby church and schoolhouse stand
Deserted. Mid-day heat of summer sun
Benumbs the slightest stir of torpid air
A concentrated pause, a jettison
Of time, a stillness holds the pair
Of buildings for a moment; then below
The twisted juniper a cricket sings.
A fisher trudges up the road in slow
Ascending step with sweat for every swing.
He looks to sea; then passes on until
The church and school alone command the hill.

Becalmed

The sultry wizard sun inhales the sea
In rising mist conjuring headland capes
With murky wisps of white transparency.
Limp sails, thin, bright, skin-like, collapse in drapes
With each quick slapping of the boom. Wing-free
A gull, the leanest, hungriest of shapes,
Descends from flight to pounce upon debris.
It bolts its food and greedily escapes.
In welling surge the satin-sided swells
Raise up the boat and curling splash below
Then leave her sliding on the downward side
To where another mounting wave propels.
As years push time in steady even flow,
So undulations ride the endless tide.

Fog

Soft arcs by ghostly, coasting wings of mist
Caress the fluffy tops of young spruce trees
And molt some silver feathers. Nervous breeze
Subsides to easy movements which assist
Each cloud in gliding. Meadows lie so wet
That water spills from every bloom and seeps
In thirsting earth. The bay-leaf slowly steeps
A spicy brew. The grasses weave a net
To catch the soothing dew. The thorny rose
And bramble peer below a granite brow
To watch the shore line patiently allow
The rinsing of its hair. Pale wisps enclose
Suggestions and reflections of a boat
Which floats through fog unseen from shore, remote.

St Lo

A saw, one time, a corpse of brick and stone,
A city dead, a lifeless gouging caught
And ripped wide open to expose the bone
Destroying all the frame beyond a thought
Of anything but what it was, debris in slime.
Where twenty thousand should evacuate,
No home was left complete, a fitting shrine
To war on vacant hills of clay and slate.
In dreams this corpse shoves through the crowds
Of thought, which roar about my brain,
Then flaunts deep scars from under mourning shrouds.
But when I visit at this scene again
In life, cool grasses will have built a dome
To shade and hide it as they did for Rome.

Campfire

Glissade from cloudless morning sky down white
And stinging whiffs of smoke. Slide past a top
Of higher trees where leaves reflect clean light
From glistening frond to frond; then slowly drop
To young, gray balsam spires that thirst for sun.
Through acrid billows glide by black or brown
Rough bark and heavy trunks where mosses run
Their ice-blue fingers northward. Ride on down
To flames that generate this smoky trail
From glowing coals, gray ash, and gleaming wood,
But pause where pan and coffee pot exhale
The teeming smells of breakfast, understood
By tardy hunters as their cue to rise
And pierce the lonely forest for a prize.

On the Zugspitze

Through thin, high air bright morning came
As clear as soaring violins and sent
Short brittle notes of light where snow drifts went
Careening down the mountain with the same
Star-reaching tones. The tattered shadows caught
Behind bright rocks, opaque and curled like rags
Of night cast off to clothe the naked crags.
The brilliant crystals danced while sunshine taught
The step. A solitary skier threw
A path of life across the waste, so free
And rhythmic that he seemed to be a part
Incorporate with sparkling world. There flew
Reflection trailing him with mimicry
And racing over winter's vibrant heart.

Silences

A silent moment falls inane on time
When meditated sadness tries to speak
But finds the current language is so weak
It merely taunts its quest in passive mime.
A soundlessness replaces final breath
Removing human power to revive
And forms the mouths of those who yet survive
With babbling words describing death.
A salient hush precedes an ardent kiss
When youth's emotion beams on world of fact
Blue gleams of hope and crystal dreams refract
As welding love fulfills her nemesis.
These silences like snow enwrap the earth
And give a living lustre to each noisy birth.

APPENDIX

THE RIVER 1916 - 1949

Incessant dampness glutted mud-stuck trenches
With piercing rain or war incumbent on death.
Cold drops iced each quivering muscle
And bored into every wallowing brain
A sluice for burning pain leading deep in souls of men.
This deluge forced dull squinting eyes,
Half closed with vague Victorian sight,
To explore with rage - incited, wider vision.
Iconoclastic floods of thought swept away
The cloying sweetness of an age and shook
The rotted, tottering foundations of morality,
Tumbling walls collapsing their stones in muck.
When death-giving rain had ceased, men met
On higher ground to wonder at the river's work.
They probed the sour silt-filled cellars
Condemning weakened walls to fall.
In men grew a disillusionment, a tearing down.
They groveled in the rubble, restlessly
Examined their wretched city, hopelessly active,
Constructively inert. Then came
The deadly rain again. Core-chilling war,
New sky-ripping wetness, swelled
The satiate river to flow upon debris.

It tossed and curled among the gaping walls
Where the hopeless had disdained to build.
This force inundate had no precepts to destroy
But swept unhindered over ugly world.
At last the storm gathered up its horror
And billowed on before the brighter air.
The dripping wreck was once again emerged
For men to turn and pry wet stubborn stones.
Their minds, already beaten down, only see
That walls are left and hearths remain.
Upon this flood-gouged pile men yet can build;
Perhaps can shut the river out.
Even as they begin the laden clouds
Rise up with new and untold power.

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